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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000460

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [GV](#)  
SUBJECT: CHARGE MEETS WITH NEW MINISTER OF THE PRESIDENCY

REF: A. CONAKRY 0447  
[1](#)B. CONAKRY 0457  
[1](#)C. CONAKRY 0452

Classified By: A/DCM SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. During an August 22 courtesy call, the new Minister Secretary General of the Presidency, Alpha Ibrahima Keira was polite, but close-mouthed. He stressed that he is the liaison between the government and the president, but said that he expects things to go smoothly. With upwards of a dozen people waiting to see him, the halls outside of Keira's office were quietly chaotic. A former minister of finance and influential behind the scenes figure, Kassory Fofana, dropped by for an impromptu visit. Keira's body language and manner of speech throughout the meeting suggest that it might be difficult for us to develop a positive, collaborative working relationship with him. END SUMMARY.

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IN THE CORRIDORS OF INFLUENCE  
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[1](#)2. (C) Charge and A/DCM met with the new Minister Secretary General of the Presidency, Alpha Ibrahima Keira, on August 22 for an initial courtesy call. The atmosphere outside the minister's office was quiet chaos. The waiting room was full of people while a number of others waited in the hallway. The Charge waited for about 20 minutes as a series of presidential guards and administrative staff gave mixed instructions about where to go. In an attempt to determine whether the Charge was even at the right office, he asked one assistant if the former Secretary General of the Presidency, Sam Soumah, had also used the same office. The assistant lowered his voice to a stage whisper and replied that Soumah was no longer working at the presidency.

[1](#)3. (C) Keira, wearing casual denim rather than the more formal boubou or western-style suit, was gracious as he received the Charge. However, his body language and manner of interlocation throughout the meeting was subtly arrogant, and suggested that he would have rather been doing something else. Despite repeated attempts to draw Keira into conversation, the meeting was little more than a perfunctory nod to protocol. At one point during the meeting, the Minister of Technical and Professional Education, opened the door without knocking, excused himself for interrupting, and then proceeded to enter the room with two of his colleagues in order to shake hands with Keira, saying that he would be waiting for him outside to finish. One of the other gentlemen who entered the room was a former finance minister, Kassory Fofana, who is suspected of being one of the key personalities behind the president.

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THE BUCK GOES THROUGH ME  
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¶4. (C) After exchanging diplomatic pleasantries regarding our strong bilateral relationship and continuing cooperative efforts, the Charge asked Keira how we plans to fulfill his role within the government, as the Minister Secretary General of the Presidency. Referring to a recent presidential decree clarifying that all documents for the president must go through Keira (reftel A), he said that his main job is to ensure effective communication between the president and the government. The Charge mentioned Prime Minister Souare specifically, to which Keira responded by repeating that all members of government will liaise through him. With respect to Souare, Keira said that he and the PM have worked together in the past, and that he considers him a long-term colleague. "I don't imagine that there will be much divergence of interest or difference of opinion between our offices," he said.

¶5. (C) A/DCM asked about the recent political appointments to the office of the president, which include a number of advisors for political, economic, and judicial affairs, among other things (reftel B). Keira said that these appointments comprise his personal staff and will report directly to him. He noted that these positions had existed previously, and he did not replace everyone because he wants to wait to evaluate the quality of their work.

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SLAPS ON THE HAND FOR SOUMAH AND THIAM  
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¶6. (C) A long, uncomfortably silent pause followed an inquiry about Keira's predecessor, Sam Soumah. To prod the

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conversation along, the Charge mentioned Soumah's recent arrest. Keira said "yes, well he embezzled 500,000 CFA." When asked about the status of the case, Keira said that the president had intervened and demanded Soumah's liberation. "You know, the president does not want to create any problems right now," he added. A similar inquiry about the former Chief of Protocol, Idrissa Thiam, yielded a similar response. Keira said that Thiam was in trouble for falsifying decrees, passports, etc. (COMMENT - A warrant for Thiam's arrest was reportedly issued on August 21 for embezzlement - see septel. END COMMENT).

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ELECTIONS YES, BUT SECURITY FIRST  
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¶7. (C) The Charge emphasized the importance of holding legislative elections, and setting an election date in the near term. Keira agreed and said that the government is talking to all the stakeholders in order to advance "transparent, credible elections acceptable to all." He added that to have good elections, the country must also have strong security.

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MORE CRIMINAL THAN THE CRIMINALS  
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¶8. (C) Turning to narcotics trafficking, the Charge congratulated Keira on the GoG's successful cocaine burning earlier this week (reftel C). He emphasized that the GoG must attack the problem directly, warning that drug trafficking elements could soon amass enough power and influence to overturn the government. Keira said that he was happy to hear that the USG shares this concern. He said that the GoG's problem is that they don't have the means to effectively address the problem, noting that they needed test kits, scanners, and a specially trained unit in particular. However, Keira cautioned that when the GoG starts to "take care of drug traffickers, we don't want to hear anything about human rights. Sometimes we have to be more criminal than the criminals to take care of the problem."

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COMMENT  
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19. (C) The meeting was useful as a general sounding out of Keira, but the prospects of cultivating a positive, collaborative working relationship with him appear uncertain.

In contrast to others we have met in the government, including the PM, Keira was largely disinterested in anything we had to say. There were no questions about possible assistance, statement of priorities, or discussion of ideas as to how to advance reforms. Previously reported descriptions of Keira ordering the unions to refrain from labor strikes ring true as he came off as hard-nosed and uncompromising. Keira has been linked in previous reporting to Kassory Fofana, a linkage that Kassory's casual drop-by seems to confirm. END COMMENT.

BROKENSHIRE